

Memorandum

TO: All DSHS HIV Prevention Contractors Implementing Popular Opinion Leader (POL)

FROM: HIV/STD Comprehensive Services Branch

DATE: 09/21/04

SUBJECT: Frequency of Training Sessions

Recruitment and retention pose major hurdles for many organizations implementing evidence-based interventions. In searching for solutions, some look to the intervention format. Popular Opinion Leader (POL) has a format that calls for four 90-120 minute sessions. With one session held each week, one cycle of the intervention takes four weeks to complete. Organizations are therefore asking, "Is there a way to complete the training in a shorter timeframe"?

To better answer this question, Branch staff sought technical assistance from the Academy of Educational Development (AED), the national trainer of POL, and researched recent articles published by Jeff Kelly, the principle investigator of the intervention.

Areas required to be maintained, and those with flexibility include:

- 1. The length and core content of each session cannot be changed.
- 2. There is flexibility in the interval, or amount of time between sessions 1-2-3. Examples: one program may decide to implement sessions 1-2-3 on a Monday, Wednesday and Friday evening schedule, respectively; while another program might implement all three sessions back-to-back on a Saturday afternoon.
- 3. Adequate time must be allowed between sessions 3 and 4. Session participants need sufficient time to complete the session 3 homework, holding the safer sex conversations with peers. Session 4 consists of reporting the homework results, along with problem-solving and additional skills building around these conversations. These conversations are an essential piece in the effectiveness of the intervention. Successful conversations are the foundation of the diffusion process through which community norms change.
- 4. Maintenance of trained POL's must occur, with activities like the "reunion" session, or through follow-up by the facilitator.

"It is still difficult for even socially skilled and popular people to initiate conversations with AIDS prevention endorsement messages, especially in the course of natural interactions.... By adopting an intervention format in which POLs intensively practice conversations during a group meeting, make plans and set goals for talking with others in the next week, have the conversations in real life, and then are reinforced for their successes and have the opportunity to discuss any problems encountered, POLs are supported in the roles. The critical active ingredient responsible for the impact of the POL intervention is not just the training of opinion leaders. Instead, it is the ongoing quality and number of conversations each opinion leader has with others".

From J. A. Kelly, AIDS CARE, February 2004

If you wish to make any changes in your POL program model, please discuss these issues with your Field Operations Consultant and complete the attached adaptation request.